

Membership Tips

Draft Component of the Neighborhood Workbook and Resource Kit*

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Recruiting Members

Your neighborhood organization can initially attract members through well-publicized meetings and by directly involving people in group projects. However, many organizations inadvertently restrict their numbers by making membership forms and sign-up sheets available only at meetings.

To maximize its membership potential, your neighborhood organization should undertake a membership drive that directly reaches every household. If your neighborhood organization is relatively young, wait until a few projects have been completed before launching the drive. A drive sponsored by an organization that is unknown will be hampered by skepticism and doubts of legitimacy.

The best approach for a membership campaign is to have volunteers go door-to-door calling on neighbors. Your group can consider a weeklong or one-day blitz to help volunteers maintain enthusiasm and then sponsor a party for volunteers where fun can be had and experiences shared. The many arguments and appeals about why people should join and the benefits they and the neighborhood will gain from membership should be reviewed.

Volunteers should be armed with printed matter to encourage residents to join. This can be a brochure or simple letter from your chairperson that explains the organization, stresses why neighborhood support is needed, includes details of upcoming activities, and urges each contact to attend. A newsletter or brochure can also be given to each resident. Volunteers should carry membership forms with them and offer both immediate and mail-in membership opportunities. Your organization can also develop a block leader network as the foundation of its membership

Project Ideas for Strengthening and Increasing Membership

Potluck Suppers

Potluck suppers are festive neighborhood events and can be modified to suit any occasion. For example, your organization could sponsor a holiday potluck supper preceded by a songfest or caroling in the community. Your group could also ask residents to bring community specialties or dishes that begin with the initials of their last names. In addition to bringing neighbors together, potluck suppers can also be used to attract new members or thank volunteers.

Cleanup Days

A cleanup day is an important way to boost community spirit, involve the community-at-large in your organization, and let everyone know that your group works for the betterment of all. To organize one, your group can assign block captains to inform residents, post signs at local stores, and handout flyers around the community. Volunteers can be enlisted to help older residents clear their yards, driveways, or curb areas of debris. Your group can even exchange cleanup services with neighbors for attendance at one neighborhood meeting. Once neighbors attend one meeting, they are bound to come back again. Arrangements can also be made with the city for a special trash pick-up for the day.

Logo Contest

Logos are an important part of a group's identity. Sponsoring a create-a-logo contest is a good way to involve residents of all ages and gain publicity for your organization. Contest entries can be displayed at a prominent location, such as a local bank, and judged by a panel. Prizes, donated by local businesses, could be awarded to winners and runners-up.

campaign and other activities. Officers or board members can contact potential block leaders to explain their duties and to gain approval for publishing their names and telephone numbers in the newsletter. In addition to building membership, block captains can also welcome new residents, pass out flyers and newsletters, serve as a conduit for specific problems on the block, and place volunteers in activities.

Retaining Members

Getting members is only half the battle. For every member who is active in the organization, there are probably two who would be involved if they were properly motivated. The following tips will help your neighborhood organization retain members after they have joined.

1. **Help members find a place in your organization.** Not everyone is a self-starter. Many will offer to help, but have no idea where to begin. A list of volunteer activities that includes a job description and approximate time commitment for each task should be developed and made available.
2. **New people should always be welcomed.** Your officers and steering committee should watch out for new faces and welcome them assertively. Each new member or guest should be introduced to someone who lives near or who shares a similar interest.
3. **The appearance of cliques should be avoided.** New members who see the same people running every project will feel excluded and may not return. People who are not part of the core group or steering committee should be appointed to leadership roles. Moreover, decisions and projects should always be explained to everyone. It should not be assumed that every member has been involved from the beginning.

Block Party

A block party is a sure-fire way to bring people out and get them together at a pancake breakfast, bar-b-que, street festival, or similar celebration. The block party encourages residents to get to know each other and to spread the word about current or planned neighborhood activities. It is useful to have neighborhood newsletters, brochures, and membership forms displayed at the party.

Moving Display

Your group can publicize its activities and neighborhood by constructing a simple display or using a large bulletin board. Photographs, posters, maps, and other materials can be attractively arranged and held in place with pushpins. The display can be set up for conferences and festivals or placed in offices, banks, or City Hall lobbies.

Restoration Celebration

By bringing do-it-yourselfers together for a social hour, your neighborhood group can reinforce home improvement momentum while simultaneously bringing in new members. These gatherings could be held on a regular basis, perhaps in newly renovated homes so that guests can see for themselves the many benefits of self-initiated home repair, discuss mutual repair problems and exchange ideas and suggestions on how to fix up older houses.

Neighborhood Fair

Your neighborhood can organize a neighborhood fair featuring food, games, music, and live entertainment. A park can be reserved or a permit obtained to block-off a residential street. Committees for publicity, decorations, food, games, and entertainment should be organized well in advance. The fair can be held to celebrate a holiday, it can be organized around a theme, such as Old Spain, or it can just be a gathering to bring neighbors together and inform them about your organization. Hosting a fair will let your neighbors know that joining the organization is not all work and no play.

4. Meetings should be well organized.

Busy people will not attend meetings or involve themselves in organizations that they consider to be a waste of time. A written agenda should be provided and followed. The meetings should have and follow a time limit. The meeting facilitator should be sensitive to new ideas and new people, should be resourceful, and should attempt to limit talkative speakers without being offensive. Results of previous activities should be announced at meetings.

5. Activities and meetings should be fun.

Making neighborhood activities a constant drudgery will quickly burn out volunteers and organizers. Sponsoring parties and celebrations to enjoy neighbor-ing will allow members to get to know each other. Nonetheless, remember to plan activities that appeal to everyone. If activities are planned that appeal only to the wine and cheese crowd, the beer and pretzel people will never be fully involved. Make efforts to involve everyone at your social events, including children and the elderly, because the support and talents of all are needed!

6. Remember that the members of the neighborhood organization make the final decisions - not the president or chair person.

The president or chair person should do what the membership wants because the collective whole is the democracy. Organizations that are run like dictatorships will quickly lose active supporters.

Tours For City Officials

Briefing local officials on neighborhood problems and accomplishments is important for building rapport with City Hall and your organization. A walking or driving tour of one or more neighborhoods is a good way to show elected officials and departmental staff what your organization has accomplished and what city actions are helping and hindering the neighborhood.

Speakers' Bureau

Setting up speaking engagements is a good way to publicize your neighborhood group. A lecture or a multi media production might be an interesting way to get neighbors out to learn more about your organization.

Green Up Days

A green-up day can get residents into the spring spirit by providing them with flowers and plants for yards, curbing strips, and window ledges. Your neighborhood group can organize committees to locate a nursery that will provide plants in quantity at market prices (or below), publicize the project, and obtain prepaid orders from interested residents. Another committee can be responsible for finding a central delivery point where residents can pick up their orders and make home deliveries to senior citizens and the disabled. This activity is sure to create a neighborhood-wide dialogue about your group and the things it does to make the community a better place for all.

Neighborhood Newsletter

Creating a neighborhood newsletter is a good way to inform neighbors about your organization and the community-at-large. Try to make your newsletter as interesting as possible so that people will want to read it. The better your newsletter is, the more popular it will become. If it becomes popular enough, you can begin to use it as a fringe benefit to joining your organization.